

215 West Gwinnett Street
Savannah Victorian Historic District
Savannah
Chatham County
Georgia

GA-1169 A

HABS,
GA,
26-SAV,
53A-

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20243

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
SAVANNAH VICTORIAN HISTORIC DISTRICT

215 WEST GWINNETT STREET

HABS No. GA-1169A

Location: 215 West Gwinnett Street, south side of street between Barnard and Jefferson Streets, Savannah, Chatham County, Georgia.

Present Owner: William Whitten, c/o Savannah News Press, 111 W. Bay, Savannah, Georgia 31401 (1979).

Present Use: Vacant (1979).

Significance: An outstanding example of a mid 1880s frame townhouse noted for its formerly elegant interiors. The advanced deterioration of this house made documentation imperative. The house is one of the few with a central heating system.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1885. The property was first taxed in 1886 and valued at \$2,500; the house was thus constructed in 1885.
2. Architect: Not known.
3. Original owner: Charles H. Dorsett owned this property in Lot 42, Lloyd Ward.
4. Builder, suppliers: The word "Butler" written on the wall in the second floor hall room may indicate that John G. Butler supplied the wallpaper.
5. Alterations and additions: The eastern porch was enclosed, and the windows in the second-story bay were lengthened some time after 1893. The front steps have been replaced. The original fireplaces have been removed.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

Charles Dorsett, an auctioneer and real estate dealer, was one of the original developers of the Victorian District. He was also the director of many building and loan associations, including the Southern Mutual Loan Association, Chatham Mutual Loan Association, and Treasurer of the Savannah Mutual Loan Association. He was a manager of the Savannah Port Authority, a County Commissioner, a member of Wesley Monumental Church and superintendent of its Sunday School; he was a delegate to the Southern Immigration Association Annual Conference in 1884 and a petitioner for the Savannah Street Railway.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Important old views: A view was published in 1893 in Artwork of Savannah which shows the original front doors, front steps and open eastern porch. It also shows the original windows in the second-story bay.
2. Bibliography:
Savannah Morning News, 1884, 1885, 1886, Microfilm in Georgia Historical Society.
Savannah City Directories, 1884, 1885, Georgia Historical Society.
Morrison, Mary Lane, Tax digest abstracts and research, Lloyd Ward, Georgia Historical Society.

Prepared by: Beth Lattimore Reiter
Project Historian
Historic American Buildings
Survey
August, 1979

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This house is one of the finest examples of a Queen Anne-influenced townhouse in the Victorian District. Its character is enhanced by sawn decorative details on the exterior.
2. Condition of fabric: Poor; the house is in an advanced stage of deterioration. There are floor boards missing from the front porch, and the porch posts are collapsing. There is a rotten sill where the bay window meets the front facade. There is a completely deteriorated structural stud from ground to roof at the rear east corner between the dining room and second parlor. Due to the leaking roof, the plaster is badly deteriorated. One medallion has fallen in the first story front parlor. There was a gas leak found during the recording which has been capped.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The two-story structure measures 49'-9" across its north (front) facade by 58'-4" deep.
2. Foundations: Brick piers with open brick infill.
3. Wall construction: Clapboard siding.
4. Structural framing: Wood frame construction.
5. Porches, stoops: The wooden west porch is set on a raised brick foundation with square posts supporting a turned spindle frieze. The ceiling is trimmed with a decorative wooden groin-like pattern.

The east porch originally was identical to the west porch. It was enclosed after 1893 with continuous two-over-two windows. A brick fireplace opens onto the porch.

A rear wooden stoop with a shallow hip roof is supported by square corner posts and sawn decorative wooden corner brackets.

6. Chimneys: Two end chimneys are built into the east wall, and one in the south wall. One large orange brick chimney has been added to the east porch.
 7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways, doors: The main entrance is through the west side porch. The original pedimented front double doors are missing. They were set in a simple frame with an etched glass transom which still exists.
 - b. Windows: Two-over-two-light double-hung sash set in shouldered frames. The two-story bay on the north facade has the original floor-length, two-over-four-light double-hung sash windows on the first story, and floor-length replacements on the second. Louvered shutters, in deteriorated condition, flank openings. Wire iron grills protect the front windows.
 8. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: All roof surfaces are a shallow hip covered with standing seam tin sheating. The hexagonal domed roof over the bay also has a metal covering.
 - b. Cornice, eaves: A deep bracketed cornice extends beyond the wide frieze which is punctuated by quatrefoil vents.
- C. Description of Interior:
1. Floor plans:
 - a. First floor: Side hall plan, with double parlors to the east of hall. On the east side of the hall at the rear is the dining room; on the west side is the kitchen and pantry.
 - b. Second floor: Same as the first.
 2. Stairways: A single flight on the east wall of the hall extends from the first floor to the second. The stringers are trimmed with carved brackets, and the rail is supported by octagonal spindles.
 3. Flooring: Hardwood floors throughout.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster walls with paper. The walls and ceilings are articulated by baseboards and gold leaf picture moldings. Upstairs bath has waist-high wood wainscot.

5. Openings:

- a. Doorways, doors: Four-panel wooden doors. The door between the front hall and the parlor, and the doorway between the second and third rooms on the second floor, have portiere brackets and hoods. Sliding pocket doors are between the two parlors and between the second parlor and dining room.

- b. Windows: The windows are set in plain flat trim.

6. Decorative features: All the mantels are missing but one tile remains in the surround of the front parlor's fireplace. Most of the fireplaces have scars in the plaster which indicate the existence of mantels at one time.

Heavy plaster square medallions ornament the ceilings of the second parlor and dining rooms. The parlor medallion is inscribed with a geometric pattern, while the dining room medallion has baskets of flowers. The front parlor also had a geometric ceiling medallion, but it has fallen. These medallions may have been painted a bright color at one time.

Many of the rooms had elaborate wallpaper at one time. The wallpaper in the second-floor hall room over the foyer has a bold stylized lily design. There is evidence of a signature behind this paper which appears to be "____ Butler". Since John G. Butler was a dealer in fine wallpapers at the time this could mean he supplied this particular paper.

7. Hardware: The only notable hardware that remains is the brass window pulls.

8. Mechanical systems:

- a. Heating, airconditioning, ventilation: Floor registers in the hall and between the parlors indicate that a forced-air heating system existed at one time, but it has been removed. There is also a gas steam radiator made by the A. A. Wolff Gas Radiator Company of New York, at the front of the first-floor hall. Most of the doors have movable transoms for ventilation purposes.

- b. Lighting: The original gas piping system is visible in the ceiling medallions. The house was later converted to electricity and there are porcelain connections in the medallions also; however, no fixtures remain.

- c. Plumbing: The house was originally equipped with inside plumbing, but no original fixtures remain. A modern bath was subsequently installed adjacent to the kitchen in what was originally a pantry, but it too has been removed.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The house faces north on a town lot, set back from the lot line.
2. Historic landscape design: The 1893 photograph shows a side yard surrounded by a picket fence. The 1898 Sanborn map shows that the house originally occupied two lots; a garden, therefore, probably occupied the western lot. A two-story dwelling and shed stood in the rear yard and appear in the 1893 photograph and Sanborn map. A brick walk system with four planting areas, dating after 1898, is clearly visible in the back yard.

Prepared by: Beth Lattimore Reiter
Project Historian
Historic American Buildings
Survey
August, 1979

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey in cooperation with the City of Savannah, the Historic Preservation Section of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, the Savannah Landmark Rehabilitation Project, Inc., and Historic Savannah Foundation. The recording project was completed during the summer of 1979 under the general direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS; Kenneth L. Anderson, Principal Architect; Eric Delony, Project Coordinator, Savannah Landmark Rehabilitation Project, Inc.; Beth Lattimore Reiter, Project Historian, Savannah Landmark Rehabilitation Project, Inc.; and Susan Dornbusch, Project Supervisor, University of Virginia; with student architects Gregori Anderson (Howard University), David Fixler (Columbia University), Stephen Lauf (Temple University), and Tamara Peacock (University of Florida), at the HABS Office in Savannah, Georgia. The drawings were edited in the Washington office in September 1979 by architects Susan Dornbusch and Gregori Anderson. The historical and architectural data was reviewed and edited during October-November 1979 by staff historian Jan Cigliano. Photographs were taken in September 1979 by Walter Smalling, a staff photographer with the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service. The documentation on the historic district will be used in the rehabilitation of the residences and in developing design guidelines for the area.